

Library of Michigan Quality Services Audit Checklist History, Getting Started, and FAQ

History and Philosophy of the Quality Services Audit Checklist

Quality measures provide a foundation on which to build coherent efforts to increase the quality and impact of library services, improve the knowledge, skills and abilities of employees, and ultimately to strengthen the organization as a whole. Libraries need such a foundation, especially in times of rapid change and evolution, in order to choose the most efficient and productive paths for providing good value to their communities through high quality staff, services, programs and collections.

In December 2001, State Librarian Christie Pearson Brandau invited a committee of 22 librarians and trustees to discuss the establishment of quality measures for Michigan's public libraries. The committee, to be known as the Quality Services Advisory Committee (QSAC), included representatives from almost all of the library cooperatives and each class size library.

In February 2002, the committee met to discuss quality measures developed by other states, theoretical articles on quality measures, and futuristic ideas for improving customer services. Their job was to create a framework for the development of quality measures in Michigan.

QSAC committee members agreed on six compelling reasons for statewide quality measures:

- They will give us credibility;
- They will give us a shared vision for library service;
- They will give us an educational tool for library staff and boards, government officials such as township supervisors and county commissioners, and the general public;
- They will display achievements with our current funding;
- They will provide a base and explanation for increased funding; and,
- They will inspire us to improve service throughout the state.

Given this background, QSAC members divided library services into seven categories, Human Resources, Governance and Administration, Services, Collection Development, Technology, Facilities and Equipment, and Public Relations. Six subcommittees were formed and they developed the specific quality measures in their particular area.

The subcommittees used six guidelines in developing their measures. The group wanted measures to be customer-focused, easy-to-understand, measurable, incentive-driven, results-based, and not so burdensome that they crush good intentions.

The committee also divided the measures into three levels, Essential, Enhanced, and Excellent. Essential quality measures are the basics of all library service. They are relatively low-cost standards that every library can and should achieve. They are a review of the fundamentals of library management, collections and services.

Enhanced quality measures are more difficult to achieve than Essential. They may require more funding, and start where Essential Services leave off. These standards are a commitment by the library to quality management and services beyond the basics.

Excellent quality measures call for the highest level of service obtainable. They are an achievement for any library and require funding and commitment to superb service in all areas of library management and service.

The role of the standards envisioned by QSAC is indicated by this quote from Bob Raz, previous director, Grand Rapids Public Library, "Through these standards, librarians and trustees will understand the need for quality service and know the realistic costs. They will be able to articulate their needs to garner the support to provide the quality services the public deserves . . . and they will not be afraid."

Developing the Standards

Having established a framework on which to hang the improvement process, the call went out for volunteers to bring the committee's suggestions alive. More than 50 librarians and trustees responded, with every cooperative represented. They submitted more than 400 measures in the six categories! Some common themes and directions emerged:

- Some measures should be core, or mandatory;
- Some measures can be optional, or elective; and,
- All should work in tandem with a long-range planning process.

Within each level of service, Essential, Enhanced, and Excellent, there are two types of measures. One is core, or mandatory. These measures are considered basic quality library service, and must be realized before that level of service can be considered achieved. For example, setting by-laws for a library board is a core measure.

A second type of measure is elective, or optional. Here a library is free to choose among several options. For example, multilingual signs are a good quality measure, but are not considered a core service.

In the fall of 2002, the QSAC committee edited the suggestions down to 102 core measures and 28 electives. The Library of Michigan Board of Trustees reviewed and endorsed the measures at their January 10, 2003 meeting.

In 2003, a volunteer band of 30 library directors tested the Essential measures in their libraries. Upon completion, the measures were again edited to reflect their experiences and in 2004, libraries began submitting their applications for certification

In 2007, committees reviewed and revised the standards for the Enhanced measures and the Excellent measures. The revisions were implemented in August of 2007.

In 2009, a new committee of volunteers looked at all three levels in light of several years of change in library services and technology and the experience of hundreds of participating QSAC

libraries. As part of the measure revisions, the committee looked at the QSAC process and recommended certified libraries should renew their certification every three years. The committee completed revising the measures in January 2010 and the new measures and process were launched.

In January of 2013 a new committee of volunteers representing Class I through Class VI libraries, the cooperatives, Trustees and the Library of Michigan came together to update the QSAC measures. The committee paid special attention to the current state of library budgets and the rapid change of technology as they recommended revisions to the measures. The newly updated measures went into effect on April 1, 2013.

As a Public Library Director, How Do I Get Started with Quality Measures?

As noted in the section above, applying quality measures fits beautifully into a planning process. If you are thinking about a long-range planning process for your library, working piece by piece through the quality measures is an excellent way to start. It will give you a good sense of your strong and weak areas, highlighting places to focus development and seek additional funds.

Depending on your library size, form a committee. For a large library, this could include representatives from several departments and/or branches. For a small library, the committee could just be you, a board member, and the part-time volunteer. What is important is that together, after reviewing the QSAC materials, you slowly work your way through the measures. For now, just start with Essential. You may find you are already achieving more than you realized, or, on the other hand, are lacking in a particular area. Even if you can check off all the items listed, the group discussion cannot help but spark improved communications and service in your library.

There is an abundance of great library literature to help you achieve any goal. A wonderful bibliography for helpful texts can be found in the Wisconsin Public Library Standards, 4th edition, at <http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/standard.html> and a wealth of materials are included in the QSAC appendices at www.michigan.gov/qsac.

Remember:

- * Work through each level of service one at a time;
- * Recognize that completing each level may take several years; and,
- * Try to combine level achievement with the library's planning process.

QSAC FAQ

Are the quality measures linked to state aid?

Quality measures are not tied to current levels of state aid. However, they are useful as a tool to demonstrate the levels of funding needed to bring Michigan's public libraries into compliance with the three levels of library service. When the Michigan library community achieves higher levels of state funding in Michigan, an accounting implementation may become necessary.

If the quality measures are not linked to state aid, why should a library use them?

Quality measures can be used now to educate staff, trustees, local authorities, and state legislators. They can show your community what you have achieved with your current funding, and what could be possible if that funding was increased. The measures can be used as part of strategic planning, as examples of where and how your library can grow and improve. They are an advocacy tool for every library, regardless of size or funding level.

What do libraries receive for achieving Essential, Enhanced, or Excellent levels of service?

When a library achieves any of the three levels, they receive a letter and certificate from the Library of Michigan and their state representative and senator will be sent a letter detailing their achievement. QSAC libraries are also recognized at Library of Michigan events and the MLA Annual Conference. Sample press releases will accompany the award. The certificates for Essential, Enhanced, and Excellent service will be valid for at least three years.

Does a library have to achieve every single measure at each level?

No. There are a certain number of core measures that must be achieved. There are also elective measures from which a library chooses one or two. This system will allow for local variance and choice, while still maintaining certain benchmarks necessary for Essential, Enhanced, and Excellent service levels.

Do you have to be rich to achieve an Excellent certificate?

Not necessarily. Some technology measures are costly to implement, but QSAC encourages libraries to use them as a means for leveraging increased local funding. Some of the measures may best be achieved at the library cooperative level. A few of the measures, such as hours open, are based on class size, but most apply to all size libraries.

How often do I need to renew my certification?

Every three years. The Library of Michigan began issuing certifications for a three-year period beginning with the 2010 update. The measures are now on a three-year revision plan. Every three years, the measures will be updated to reflect participating libraries experiences and new trends in library services, programs and technology. Libraries that certified before 2010 were notified of the date they needed to renew their certification by. Libraries receiving certification in 2010 and after were given a date by which they must renew to remain certified.

How will libraries start using the measures? Can we get any help from the Library of Michigan?

Questions or concerns? Further information is available on the Library of Michigan website at www.michigan.gov/qsac or contact the Library of Michigan staff at 517-373-1580 for consultation by email, telephone or in person. Your questions and concerns will help improve the measures.